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IN BRIEF

An Information Digest From ERIC/CAPS
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THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR: SECONDARY LEVEL

School counselor roles seem to have run the gamut: they're all things to all people; they're miracle workers; they're only record-keeping and scheduling clerks; they own the guidance program. When researchers look at role perceptions and actual vs. ideal roles, they find both consensus and conflict (Bonebrake & Borgers, 1984; Helms & Ibrahim, 1985; Ibrahim, Helms, & Thompson, 1983). Variations in role and role perceptions may occur not only between districts and states, but among different groups within a school community and from school to school within a system. Current concerns for accountability and the economic bottom line further complicate attempts at counselor role definition.

Focus of This Digest. This Digest attempts to bring some clarity to the issue by focusing on the definition of the school counselor role at the secondary level. Elementary and middle school/junior high levels are the subject of separate Digests. In all three, the beginning and concluding sections are the same: the "developmental" role of school counselors, K-12 comprehensive developmental guidance, and counselor role essentials. Additional sections in this Digest cover secondary developmental guidance, a model job description for secondary counselors, recent research on counselor role and secondary guidance, and the importance of career guidance.

Developmental Role of School Counselors. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (1981, 1984a) has defined the role of school counselors as "developmental," an approach based on models of the developmental psychology of children and adolescents, and on planned interventions to assure school-life success. This approach emphasizes a proactive, facilitative counselor role in fostering the learning and growth of all students, as opposed to crisis management, trouble shooting, therapeutic counseling, or advisement for the few. The major areas of developmental need which determine counselor interventions are personal, social, academic and career.

K-12 Comprehensive Developmental Guidance. Counseling leaders regard statewide K-12 comprehensive developmental guidance programs as the most effective way to establish the developmental counselor role. This is broadly defined as providing structured developmental guidance through individual and small group counseling (aimed at both content and process needs); large group guidance (including classroom and curricular guidance); consultation with and inservice training of teachers; consultation with and education of parents; and coordination of related guidance services (ASCA, 1984a; Brown, Lamm, & Peace, 1985). The implications for counselor training include renewed emphases on child and adolescent growth and development, group work, and consultation.

Secondary Developmental Guidance

Secondary guidance is directed to the developmental stages of early and late adolescence, defined by leading developmental psychologist Erik Erikson as group identity vs. alienation and individual identity vs. role diffusion. Counselor roles at this level include the following (ASCA, 1981): (1) Organize and implement through interested teachers guidance curricula interventions that focus on important developmental concerns (e.g., identity, career choice and planning, social relationships). (2) Organize and make available comprehensive information systems for educational-vocational planning and decision making. (3) Assist students with assessment of competencies, interests, aptitudes, needs and career maturity, for use in such areas as course selection, post-high school planning, and career choices. (4) Provide remedial interventions or alternative programs for those students showing in-school adjustment problems, vocational immaturity, or general negative attitudes toward personal growth.

Model Job Description

In a model job description developed for a state comprehensive guidance program (Georgia, 1984), the secondary counselor's role focuses on four basic components. Each component description includes a rank-ordered list of roles and recommended allocations of time: (1) Guidance curriculum (35%)—classroom guidance, group guidance, group teacher advisement, and peer programs. (2) Individual planning (15%)—individual advisement, placement, and individual appraisal. (3) Responsive services (25%)—group counseling, individual counseling, consultation, information giver/disseminator, and referral. (4) System

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support (25%)--program development and evaluation, staff development, materials development, parent education, testing program, and community relations.

Recent Research on Counselor Role and Secondary Guidance

Ongoing research on counselor role perceptions suggests that parents, counselors, administrators, and the business community generally agree with the ASCA definitions and orders of importance (Helms & Ibrahim, 1985; Ibrahim, et al., 1983). Although the investigators found it significant that there is less discrepancy in role perceptions than in the past, they emphasize the importance of conducting annual needs assessments and educating the public on counselor role issues and program priorities.

State guidance directors were surveyed recently about their perceptions of the status of secondary guidance (Peer, 1985). The 37 respondents (74%) showed strong concern in a number of areas; e.g., non-professional counselor roles, the lack of statewide guidelines, and the under-delivery of services in career guidance, group guidance, and group counseling. Recommendations to counselors included: (1) Establish a broad-based steering committee to direct and evalute the program, and to provide annual written plans and evaluations. (2) Make concerted programming efforts to teach all students a guidance curriculum. (3) Make secondary guidance a statewide educational issue.

Importance of Career Guidance

The needs and expectations for career guidance have risen to an all-time high, creating an opportunity for school counselors to assume leadership in the implementation of career development outcomes (ASCA, 1984b). The potential for meeting these needs is also greater; for example, in the areas of computer-assisted career information/guidance systems, and the untapped resources of parents. While the use of computer-assisted systems carries both promises and pitfalls, the systems have been shown to be effective in several ways--disseminating career information, assisting students in clarifying values and goals and making plans, facilitating career maturity, and promoting career awareness and information-seeking activities (Cairo, 1983).

In the area of parent resources, research has consistently demonstrated parents' substantial impact on adolescent career decision making (Daniels, Karmos, & Presley, 1983). Counselors can tap into this resource by functioning as adult educators with parents, and by developing programs that will maximize the expertise and influence of both parents and counselors.

Counselor Role Essentials

If counselors are to have a realistic and effective role, it is essential to (1) assess local needs and resources, (2) establish priorities and clear objectives, (3) build in evaluation procedures, (4) communicate with the school staff and school community, and (5) work closely with staff members as a cohesive team. Otherwise, counselors are at risk of becoming what they cannot and should not be: miracle workers, sole owners of the guidance program, or the school's administrative catch-all. Ultimately, the guidance program will be only as good as the support that parents and administrators give to it--especially to the role of the counselor as a professional facilitator/educator.

Resource Documents

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ABSTRACT

This fact sheet focuses on the school counselor role at the high school level. It discusses the developmental role of school counselors, kindergarten through grade 12 comprehensive developmental guidance, and counselor role essentials. Also included are sections on secondary developmental guidance, a model job description for secondary counselors, recent research on counselor role and secondary guidance, and the importance of career guidance. (NB)

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